

**REMARKS**

Applicants submit this Amendment After Final in reply to the Final Office Action dated November 7, 2003.

As an initial matter, Applicants gratefully acknowledge the Examiner's indication of the allowance of claims 2, 6, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, and 22, and the Examiner's indication of the allowability of the subject matter of claims 8, 10, and 11. However, Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's characterizations of the allowable subject matter on page 6 of the Final Office Action, and respectfully assert that each of allowed claims 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, and 22 are separately patentable because the cited references do not teach the specific combination of aspects set forth in each of the claims.

Nevertheless, Applicants have rewritten independent claim 1 to include the subject matter of claim 10. It should be understood, however, that Applicants' inclusion of the subject matter of claim 10 in independent claim 1 does not imply that Applicants agree with the Examiner's assertion that the underlying base claim, and any intervening claims, are unpatentable. To the contrary, Applicants believe, for example, that independent claim 1, prior to amending, was patentable. However, solely in the interests of expediting the prosecution, Applicants have rewritten independent claim 1 to include the subject matter of claim 10. Accordingly, Applicants assert that independent claim 1, as amended, and its dependent claims, are now in *prima facie* condition for allowance.

In this Amendment, Applicants have cancelled claims 7, 10, and 20, without prejudice or disclaimer, amended claim 1 as set forth above, and amended claim 11 to

change its dependency from claim 10 to claim 1. Claims 1, 2, and 6 are the independent claims.

Before entry of this Amendment, claims 1-2 and 5-22 were pending in this application. After entry of this Amendment, claims 1-2, 5-6, 8-9, 11-19, and 21-22 are pending in this application. The originally-filed specification, claims, abstract, and drawings fully support the subject matter of amended claim 1. No new matter was introduced.

In the Final Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1, 5, 9, 12, and 15 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Okabe et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,309,232) ("Okabe I"); rejected claims 7 and 20 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Okabe et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,086,392) ("Okabe II"); and rejected claims 16 and 17 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Okabe I in view of Okabe II. As independent claim 1 has been amended to include the subject matter of claim 10, however, the subject matter of which the Examiner did not reject over the cited references, Applicants respectfully request the withdrawal of the Section 102 and Section 103 rejections, and the allowance of all of the pending claims.

Applicants further submit that claims 5, 8-9, 11-19, and 21-22 depend from one of independent claims 1, 2, and 6, and are therefore allowable for at least the same reasons that each of those respective independent claims is allowable. In addition, at least some of the dependent claims recite unique combinations that are neither taught nor suggested by the cited references, and therefore at least some also are separately patentable.

Applicants respectfully request that this Amendment under 37 C.F.R. § 1.116 be entered by the Examiner, placing claims 1-2, 5-6, 8-9, 11-19, and 21-22 in condition for allowance. Applicants submit that the proposed amendments of claims 1 and 11 do not raise new issues or necessitate the undertaking of any additional search of the art by the Examiner, since all of the elements and their relationships claimed were either earlier claimed or inherent in the claims as examined. Therefore, this Amendment After Final should allow for immediate action by the Examiner.

Furthermore, Applicants respectfully point out that the final action by the Examiner presented some new arguments as to the application of the art against Applicants' invention. It is respectfully submitted that the entering of the Amendment After Final would allow the Applicants to reply to the final rejections and place the application in condition for allowance.

Finally, Applicants submit that the entry of this Amendment After Final would place the application in better form for appeal, should the Examiner dispute the patentability of the pending claims.

In view of the foregoing remarks, Applicants submit that this claimed invention, as amended, is neither anticipated nor rendered obvious in view of the prior art references cited against this application. Applicants therefore request the entry of this Amendment After Final, the Examiner's reconsideration and reexamination of the application, and the timely allowance of the pending claims.

The Office Action contains characterizations of the claims and the related art with which Applicants do not necessarily agree. Unless expressly noted otherwise, Applicants decline to subscribe to any statement or characterization in the Office Action.

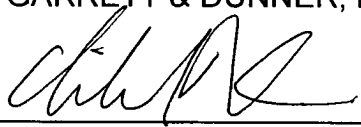
In discussing the specification, claims, abstract, and drawings in this Amendment After Final, it is to be understood that Applicants are in no way intending to limit the scope of the claims to any exemplary embodiments described in the specification or abstract and/or shown in the drawings. Rather, Applicants are entitled to have the claims interpreted broadly, to the maximum extent permitted by statute, regulation, and applicable case law.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our Deposit Account No. 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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